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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses recent trends in provision of educational programs and services reflecting the Deaf community's recognition in Australia as a linguistic and cultural minority, focusing on the Bilingual/Bicultural program of the Thomas Pattison School in Sydney (Australia). The history of Deaf culture, language, and education in Australia and the world at large is traced, leading up to the Deaf Pride movement. Education of Deaf students in light of the recognition of Deafness as a culture is examined, with a special focus on the challenges of providing multilingual education in signed English, American Sign Language, or Auslan. Incorporation of aspects of Deaf Culture into classroom teaching activities is described, including Deaf role models, Deaf history, and Deaf sports opportunities. Programs being developed in adult education centers and Deaf Studies courses at major universities, that enable Deaf people to feel an identification and sense of community are noted. (Contains 17 references.) (PB)

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**THE COUNCIL FOR EXCEPTIONAL CHILDREN
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ORLANDO, FLORIDA****DEAF CULTURE'S IMPACT ON EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS FOR THE
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INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)**Introduction**

The education of Deaf people has traditionally been controlled by hearing educators who have made decisions for Deaf people based on the perceptions of the majority culture. While there is a growing worldwide trend for Deaf people to view themselves as a distinct cultural-linguistic minority, educators have generally viewed deafness from the medical or deficiency model. Educational practices in the past have been preoccupied with the teaching of speech and language but the natural sign languages of Deaf communities have not been recognised or utilised. Increasingly Deaf people are calling for educational programs that reflect their community orientation as a linguistic cultural minority. One such program is the Bilingual / Bicultural program at The Thomas Pattison School administered by The Royal NSW Institute for Deaf and Blind Children in Sydney, Australia. The program was established in response to the request of the Deaf Community for an educational program that would affirm and represent the values of the Deaf Community. In response to the fact that Deaf people are becoming increasingly aware of their new politicisation as a cultural group, Deaf studies courses are being introduced into schools and universities to meet the demand for a culturally relevant or culturally inclusive education. This paper discusses some of these trends in Australia.

Educational Disadvantage

In the past, authorities entrusted with the education of the Deaf, lacking the evidence that sign language is a minority language, have understandably dismissed their minority language status and have attempted to serve them in the same way as other classes of handicapped children by educating them in the language of the majority culture. National surveys in the U.S. and Canada have shown that the average deaf high school student has the academic achievement of regular students half his or her age.

Studies conducted in the 1960s in the U.S. and Canada demonstrate that the vast majority of persons, born deaf, do not acquire functional language competence even after many years of schooling (Furth 1966). These studies showed that between the ages of 10 and 16 the deaf, on average, did not advance even one full grade in reading ability. Research in Britain by Conrad (1979) showed that less than 10 percent of deaf school leavers could read at an age appropriate level. This indicated the world wide nature of the underachievement of deaf people.

A comparison of 1974 and 1983 academic achievement scores of deaf students has shown that this disadvantage has not changed. (Schildroth and Karchmer cited in

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(Lowe: 1988). Evidence for this view is cited by Holdcomb, Coryell and Rosenfield (1992) in their discussion of the 1988 report to the President. The U.S. Commission on Education of the Deaf reported that the status of education of the Deaf was unacceptable and characterised by inappropriate priorities and inadequate resources. According to Mc Loughlin (1982) only one third of the hearing impaired population in the United States have high school diplomas as compared with 75% of all black students who complete high school. This indicates that the Deaf are still behind other minorities when it comes to education. Deaf students in the 1850's according to Shapiro (1993) showed literacy rates equal to their hearing peers but became increasingly illiterate as Oralism prevailed as the main educational method of instruction.

According to Shapiro (1993) in 1869, 41 % of instructors were themselves Deaf. This percentage dropped to 25% by the turn of the century and to a tiny 12% by 1960. This demonstrates that the Deaf have become disenfranchised when it comes to influence and input in their own education. Reynolds and Titus (1990) describe the way Deaf people have been disempowered even in schools for the Deaf where Deaf teachers are given classes of less able students or students with other significant disabilities, Deaf teachers are rarely given classes in the elementary grades. The message that is given to Deaf people is that it is much better to be hearing and that Deaf people are not fit role models for Deaf children. Stevens (1980) claims that the education of Deaf children in the past has been a failure. He says that educators mistakenly have focused on speech, grammar and reading, whereas communication, semantics and culture are the real prerequisites of a normal education. Stevens (1980) further argues that Deaf children do not acquire these prerequisites because their language and culture has been oppressed by hearing people to the extent that deaf people were regarded in the past as being without a language. Stevens (1980) claims that past attitudes that viewed the Deaf community as being without a language was to also adopt the position that signing was a symptom of deficiency. Stevens cites the practices of the past where parents would not admit that they used signing with their children to hearing educators, but did admit to Deaf adults that they signed with their children. In the past, Deaf teachers were traditionally given the 'slow learner' class of Deaf children. This was because Steven claims, the hearing teachers could not communicate with them and also to prevent the normal Deaf children from being tainted by the 'deafisms' of the Deaf teachers.

The Commission on Education of the Deaf (COED) submitted to the US Congress in 1988 reported that thousands of lower functioning adults were leaving high schools yearly. In a study of Low Achieving Deaf Adults, Mathay & La Fayette (1990) surveyed 40 service agencies that provided support or training services for deaf persons. The most commonly acknowledged need from these service providers for low achieving Deaf individuals was the need for independent living skills. Other obstacles mentioned by service providers included cultural deprivation, lack of available interpreters, poor social skills, poor transition planning from school to the community and general information deprivation. The Mathay & La Fayette (1990) survey confirmed the findings of the Commission on Education of the Deaf Report which stated that the educational system has not been successful in assisting the majority of deaf students achieve reading skills that are on a level equal to their hearing peers. Similarly the majority of post secondary Deaf people were found to be unemployed or seriously underemployed and the relevant rehabilitation and training

services were found to be inadequate because of the limited time for which they operated. Respondents to the Mathay & La Fayette (1990) survey held the perspective that low achieving deaf students were the victims of the system. The system was variously identified as the family, the school, state agencies, and the wider community. Respondents commented on the lack of networking between state agencies. One response to the low academic achievement of deaf students has been to question the models of delivery that have traditionally been a part of education of the deaf. A growing worldwide trend is for Deaf people to view themselves increasingly as a cultural minority group and as such programs that are sympathetic to a cultural approach rather than a medical approach are being sought to recognise this shift.

Deaf Culture and Language

Deaf people were first described as a cultural group by Stokoe, Casterline and Croneberg (1976) in their *Dictionary of American Sign Language on Linguistic Principles*. Padden and Humphries (1988) also discuss the need for a cultural approach to deafness. The foremost characteristic of Deaf culture to be recognised was its sign language. Stokoe, Casterline and Croneberg describe the unique characteristics and vigour of Deaf culture.

The remarkable concurrency of American sign language – in all fifty states, much of Canada and parts of Mexico – is a cultural phenomenon which owes more to American education, economics and social dynamics than to any linguistic factors. (1976: p. 32)

The idea that sign language is a complete and sophisticated language is relatively new to academic literature. Over the past decade there has been a growing accumulation of evidence that sign languages of the world are fully developed autonomous natural languages, with grammars and art forms all their own. (Lane: 1988) The United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation has stated that such languages be 'afforded the same status as other linguistic systems' and play 'an active part in .. educational programs for the deaf.' (UNESCO 1985 cited in Lane, 1988). Prior to research revealing that ASL was indeed a language with grammar and a structure of its own, it was commonly believed to be a broken form of English and its users to be limited in their linguistic ability. (Stewart and Akamatsu 1988).

In the U.S., American Sign Language (ASL) has been accepted by the linguistic community as a legitimate language and can be studied at the graduate level in several universities. (Stevens 1980). A Chair in Sign Language has been established in a Swedish University and more recently at the City University in London. The White Paper *Australia's Language and Literacy Policy* (ALLP) has given signing deaf people the status of a linguistic and cultural community (Dawkins : 1991) that are united by Auslan. It has also been presented in dictionary form, although it is not a written language (Johnston: 1989).

Just as other minority language groups seek to maintain their cultural integrity in the Australian context and preserve and teach their languages to successive generations, the deaf too deserve this recognition of their language. Hyde and Power (1992) have provided evidence that there are about 15,400 deaf people in Australia who use sign. For some of them it is the only language in which they can communicate, and because of the relatively low level of provision of interpreting services, their access to a whole range of public services and information as well as their personal safety and security are restricted.

Learning to sign is regarded as the means by which deaf individuals become involved in the deaf community. In a 1988 study (Stewart et al) it was found among a sample of signing deaf people, that most had learned to sign by the time they had reached high school, suggesting that for these subjects the deaf community was already a viable alternative to the hearing community.

Politicisation of Deafness.

One effect of the Civil Rights Movement in the U.S. was its influence on other minority groups. Led by Barbara Kannapell, the Deaf Pride organisation was started in 1972 to affirm deafness and counter the image of shame and deficiency placed on it over a long period of time. An annual Deafness Awareness Week became one of the activities of this group and similar weeks are celebrated by Deaf people in countries all over the world. The Deaf President Now campaign at Gallaudet University in March 1988, turned the eyes of the United States to the transformation of the Deaf community from that of a passive dependent group to a group motivated by sharing some common aims and energised by anger and resentment that had led to political action (Gannon, 1993).

Rose and Kriger (1995) have described Deaf people as undergoing positive personal and social change that has led to the challenging of those in positions of authority including educational programs for deaf children.

Challenge to Education

In Australia and certainly in the U.S., school populations are becoming more culturally diverse. It has been known to the educational establishment for some time that students from these backgrounds perform academically less well than their mainstream "Anglo" counterparts. In the past the challenge has been for the minority student to meet the language and cultural demands of the surrounding, majority culture. Jackson (1994) now claims that the responsibility should shift back to the teacher to avoid the mistakes of the past. Jackson says that teachers need to become biculturally and if possible multiculturally aware and focus on cooperative learning that provides more appropriate cultural matches between learning and instructional styles for some minority students.

It has been demonstrated that English language acquisition of Deaf school leavers has not been high even though this has been the main focus of education for the Deaf in the past. While spoken language has always had an importance for educators and indeed for those who have access to it, it should be recognised that for most Deaf people it represents an unsatisfactory medium for communication. Communication in sign is the preferred means of communication of many Deaf people. However the actual teaching of a native sign language has not been a feature of educational programs in the past and deaf students have even been known to be involved in teaching sign language to their teachers (Hall, 1995). In the past Deaf children have entered a classroom where at best the only form of communication was the monolingual signed English as presented and understood by the teachers. The language production of these children was not judged on its content but on its correctness as compared to the grammatical structures of English. Erting (1978) claims that by discouraging the use of the child's own language, educators are thwarting communication and sending negative messages about that child's identity as a Deaf person.

Culturally Sensitive Education

In similar ways teachers of the Deaf need to be seeking out teaching models that are more culturally sympathetic to the Deaf Community. Given the lack of Deaf teachers in education, Deaf students need "visible" Deaf adults to be accessible in the classroom as role models and as individuals expressing various abilities and facets of Deaf culture. In the Thomas Pattison School, in Sydney, Australia, Deaf Teachers' Aides are employed and work full time in the classroom so that Auslan (Australian Sign Language) can be modelled for the Deaf children. In addition the Deaf Teachers' Aides share the children's preferred language of communication and their identity.

Teaching Deaf children in their own preferred language is the approach that has adopted at The Thomas Pattison School. Auslan is the language of instruction in the classroom. Many of the children in the school have already attended a Bilingual / Bicultural Pre-School prior to attending the elementary school and are the children of Deaf parents. Parents who are not Deaf choose to send their children to the school because they have recognised that their child will need a sense of community as he/she is growing up.

Cultural Inclusion

Teachers at The Thomas Pattison School consciously include aspects of Deaf Culture into the classroom teaching activities. The children are mostly from homes where both parents are Deaf. More recently deaf children have joined the program whose parents are hearing people. Everyday discussions would include "Do you have a TTY (telephone typewriter for the deaf) in your house?". Another conversation may go like this. "We had visitors last night, when all our lights flashed, I went to see who it was" The deaf child was in this instance referring to their fully deaf family who has lights that flash in every room of the house when someone rings the doorbell. From these conversations deaf children from hearing families gain experience of the modifications Deaf people make to their homes to carry out their daily living.

Deaf Culture is also promoted by encouraging visits by adult Deaf people so that young Deaf children can see adult Deaf role models so that they can grow into confident and capable people. Visits have included Deaf people from a wide range of professions and ages. Some elderly Deaf people came and taught the children how to play carpet bowls. On seeing a photograph of the original school building on the first site of the School for the Deaf, the elderly person pointed to the window where his bedroom had been. This piece of history fascinated the children and helped give them a sense of the history of their community.

Sports days have been held when Deaf children from all over the Sydney area have been invited to attend. A recent Sports Day included Deaf volunteers who supervised various activities. This portrayed the Deaf people in a positive light as they were "in charge". After the Sports Day a number of letters were received from participating schools and some phone calls from parents who commented on the good organisation of the day which was in contrast with other such days that they had attended.

In addition to special events like Sports Days there are Parent Days, Open Days, Deaf Pride Week and so on when both Deaf and hearing visitors are welcomed to the school. Apart from these events Deaf Culture also is woven into the students educational program in a natural way. One class studying the local area also looked at the services and places that were significant in the area to Deaf people. On a visit to the

local shopping Centre the class stopped by the home of one student whose mother invited them all inside for refreshments. This student who has hearing parents was originally from another country. Their home included many objects from their country of origin and was furnished in a way that was somewhat in contrast to other Australian homes. This provided yet another opportunity for students to make cultural comparisons.

Deaf Studies Course are now being developed and taught in some schools in New South Wales. Materials to support these course are also being developed. Signed and captioned videos are becoming available and some Bilingual / Bicultural programs are making a conscious effort to record materials that are culturally important. These include samples of students telling stories and older deaf people's recollections and reminiscences of their lives and education. Two organisations in NSW The Adult Education Centre and The New South Wales Association of the Deaf have worked jointly on a video of Deaf history named "Heritage in Our Hands" (Warby and Clancy 1994). The Deafness Resources Project at Griffith University in Queensland, Australia has produced the videos *Signs of Life: Australia's Deaf Community* and *Signs of Language* which present the vibrancy of the Deaf Community and the community's language Auslan. Another video *Signs of Language* has been produced at the Centre for Deafness Studies and Research also at Griffith University which presents Auslan, the language of the Australian Deaf Community

Establishing a Deaf Identity

Carty (1994) has described the great contrast in identity found among Deaf people and she cites two examples that have emerged from Deaf Studies workshops conducted around Australia. These are :

"I thought everyone in the world was deaf"

"I thought I was the only deaf person in the world"

Carty(1994) claims that these statements describe the extremes of the range of experiences of Deaf people and gives one a sense of the great distance that some Deaf people have to travel psychologically to come to a point of discovering the Deaf Community and embracing a Deaf identity. Carty describes *confusion, frustration/anger/blame, exploration, identification/rejection, ambivalence, acceptance* as six stages in the emotional journey that a Deaf person may take in their search for identity (Carty 1994. p.42). She makes the comparison with the Australian Aboriginal community, many of whom were removed from their biological families and placed with white foster families. Their search for their lost identities in trying to find their families is compared with educational practices that placed deaf children in mainstream settings thus threatening their opportunity to develop a Deaf identity. The establishment of a Deaf identity is a focus of many of the Deaf Studies and related programs that are emerging in Australia. For Deaf people to see themselves positively and to feel an identification and sense of community is seen as a desirable outcome for these programs.

Adult Education

The Adult Education Centre for Deaf and Hearing Impaired Persons(AEC) in Sydney Australia and the Technical and Further Education Commission (TAFE) are both agencies that deal predominantly with the adult Deaf population. Both provide low cost or free educational programs that can be accessed by Deaf people. The Adult

Education Centre provides courses that could be described as "enriching", whereas TAFE provides access to a large body of tertiary education courses that lead to the person acquiring certification that leads to being qualified to practice a trade or profession. Typically the AEC promotes courses in literacy skills, assertiveness training, driver education, Deaf Studies, Auslan and many others. These courses seldom lead to recognised certification but serve a vital place in often preparing a Deaf person for the next phase in their education or in improving their quality of life and their understanding and access to the wider society.

TAFE provides support through the use of interpreters and notetakers as well as individual tutorial support from subject specific staff to enable the access of Deaf people. Special provision of extra time, interpreters, and separate location and supervision for exams are now standard practice in TAFE and in all public exams in the school system.

It can be seen that Deaf people are increasingly taking their place in accessing mainstream educational provisions with the support network that is currently in place. Many Deaf people would argue that the need for access is only just being addressed and that support services need to be expanded. Deaf people's increasing tendency to view themselves as a cultural group has led to the demand for Deaf Studies courses to inform and skill professionals working in the area to the new orientation of many of their clients. These courses are serving the dual purpose of informing professionals in the field as well as providing affirmation for Deaf people.

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